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Winter Food of Birds

If one would obtain information of birds and how they subsist through the winter months around Salt Lake City, one must be willing to experience many discomforts. Bright, sunny days are the exception and not the rule. Generally from November to February the ground is covered with from six inches to one foot of snow and the temperature is around zero. Added to the unpleasantness of winter murkiness is the smoke nuisance. Fingers and feet often suffer with cold while one is slowly moving about or waiting, and observations must be made between breaths as it so readily congeals on one's glasses that it makes vision impossible. The winter of 1933-34 was an exception, however. In January the ground was not only bare, but much of the time without frost.

Food and shelter are the chief concern of the birds, and not the cold or storm, and the manner in which they solve the problem of living under these conditions offers an interesting problem for investigators. The following account of some of the available foods is not derived from stomach contents but is solely from field observations.

Wild fruits, consisting of wild rose, haws or thorn apples, choke, sarviss and elder berries, contribute much toward the support of both resident and winter visiting birds. Perhaps it is because the domestic apples left on the trees of our orchards come more often under my observation as food for our winter fruit-eating birds that I consider them the most important.

The wild haw, the most prolific of our wild fruit, is only sufficient to feed an invasion of Bohemian Waxwings for a short time. Sooner or later they must resort to the orchards or move on. These birds do not come every winter, but when they do their number is apt to be legion. It is their good fortune when they find plenty of hanging or wind-fallen apples, and the frozen or rotten ones are not only acceptable but seem to be preferred.

The domestic apple is also the principal food of Robins because it is more abundant than other food though they prefer wild fruits and ornamental berries and the seeds of the sumac trees. In one orchard I have often found Flickers feeding on these fallen apples also.

The Cedar Waxwings are not numerous, but those I found were feeding upon juniper berries and haw apples. Where haw clumps occur in the mountains, the Ruffed Grouse is sure to be found after the heavy snows come. The Dusky Grouse's principal winter food is conifer needles, which is a good reason for calling them the "pine hen," but I have found these birds also feeding on wild rose apples.

The seed of the Russian Thistle, more commonly known as tumble weed, because of its wide and very general distribution, is one, if not the most important winter food supply of our seed-eating birds. The seed occurs singly in a thorny leafed bracket along the stems and is a little larger than a wild mustard seed. When plants become detached and are blown about, they doubtless lose

much of their seeds, but there is always enough left to attract birds wherever it lodges in windrows, along willow thickets, fences or ditches. These accumulations also provide cover, for the plants pile upside down, holding snow like a roof. I have seen Song Sparrows enter such a snow house at an exposure and emerge twenty feet away at another and most likely they were feeding all the way.

The stands that have remained intact, though dwarfed, on some sun-facing hillsides or wind-swept ridges, serve to tide the birds over long or heavy storm periods. Sun and wind expose these stands long before the snow-covered larger plants of the level places are made available. It is on these that the hordes of Horned Larks, not only the native desert but several of the northern species, are largely dependent for their winter sustenance.

My few observations of Rosy Finches have all been made around plants of this species and on two occasions the flocks numbered over a thousand birds each. On another occasion I saw a flock of Rosy Finches feeding side by side with a flock of Horned Larks of equal number. They did not intermingle, however, for as one species would come up with the other they would change their course. Both species were equally amiable with their kind as many birds would feed upon one plant as it would reasonably accommodate. The plants had been very recently uncovered by winds, for on either side of the small area snow was about two feet deep.

At another time I saw a flock of twenty-five or thirty Horned Larks in an east and west line facing a south wind so strong as to make standing or walking difficult, yet these birds were able to catch the seeds that were blown across the snow-crusted surface.

During heavy snows in the winter of 1932-33, large flocks of Horned Larks came into the city and fed on pigweed that grows on vacant lots or along garden edges. The seeds are very small and were easily shaken from the plant to the snow, where they were recovered.

The wild sunflower is the seed-eating birds' salvation in the time of storm, and is one of the most sought after foods at all times. When all other seed-bearing plants are buried beneath the snow, these still show above it. Along the railways, the highways, deserted farms and uncultivated slopes are stands of this joy to the eye in summer and provender for birds in winter.

Pine Siskins outnumber several to one all other feeders on this fare; Juncos and Linnets are next in number, followed closely by Gambel Sparrows and Pale Goldfinches. Our wintering Blackbirds, both Red-wing and Brewer, are quite dependent upon this stock, although the Brewer less than the Red-wing. The former resorts to the stockyards and contends with the House Sparrows for the wastes of those places. When the sunflower occurs near their cover, both Quail and Pheasants show a preference for it. Along canyon roads or other Chickadee territory I have seen both the Mountain and Long-tailed Chickadees leave trees in search of sunflower heads. The Spurred Towhee also feeds frequently on these seeds.

The box elder seeds seem to be all that is necessary or desired by the host of Evening Grosbeaks that wintered in these parts for the three years previous to 1933.

C. W. Lockerbie, Salt Lake City, Utah.



The October Field Trip was taken on Sunday, the 13th, to Lake Merced, San Francisco, with eleven members and six guests. A bright, sunny morning gave way to a dark, cloudy afternoon.

Either the usual number of birds were not present, or were too quiet and well hidden for our observation as our list is very small compared with those of other years.

A Red-breasted Nuthatch was found among the eucalyptus trees at the north end of the larger lake. One Sora Rail was seen flying across an open space among the tules near the lower end of the larger lake and six more were seen along the eastern shore of the lake between the power house and the road which leads into the golf links. The usual large flock of Gulls was again present in the center of the larger lake. The great majority of them were California Gulls, a very few Western.

There was a small flock of Eared Grebes on the smaller lake and with them was one which had the appearance of an Eared Grebe but for its plumage, which was white all over except for a brownish streak down its back and a gray head. The other grebes kept diving in Eared Grebe fashion, but this albino individual did not dive once during our observation of it. It acted like a young bird which wanted to be fed when others came very close to it.

The total list of forty species follows:

Horned Grebe	American Coot	Western Robin
Eared Grebe	Western Gull	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Western Grebe	California Gull	Audubon Warbler
Pied-billed Grebe	Bonaparte Gull	Yellow-throat
California Heron	Anna Hummingbird	Brewer Blackbird
Black-crowned Night Heron	Kingfisher	House Finch
Common Mallard	Red-shafted Flicker	Willow Goldfinch
Baldpate	Black Phoebe	San Francisco Towhee
Ruddy Duck	Chickadee	Junco
Western Red-tailed Hawk	Bush-tit	Nuttall Sparrow
Marsh Hawk	Red-breasted Nuthatch	Golden-crowned Sparrow
Sparrow Hawk	Wren-tit	Song Sparrow
California Quail	Vigors Wren	
Sora Rail	Tule Wren	

Members present: Mrs. Ruby H. Thomas; Misses Cohen, Danz, Griffin, Papina, Werner; Messrs. Bremer, Bryant, Chase, Davis, Power. Guests: Mrs. Anabel; Misses Clausen, Davis, Rhoades; Mr. Petersen; Master Don Blair.

Chas. A. Bryant, Historian and Leader.



Saline Crusted Birds Perish in Salt Lake

Waters of Great Salt Lake have dropped two inches below the all-time recorded low, readings of the gauge at Midlake show, and are so heavy with salt that birds alighting on the surface cannot rise again, H. E. Watts, Ogden, reports.

The lake level is eighteen feet below the all-time high recorded in 1868 and forty-two inches below the "zero" mark on the gauge.

Watts said Pelicans were dying of hunger and thirst by hundreds because salt encrustations made them too heavy to fly. A single feather from one bird weighed two and one-half ounces.

(Southern Pacific Bulletin, October, 1935.)

Audubon Notes

November Meeting: The regular meeting will be held on Thursday, the 14th, at 8 p. m., room 19, Ferry Building.

The speaker of the evening will be Mr. D. D. McLean, Field Naturalist of the Division of Fish and Game, whose subject will be "Some Birds of Western Canada."



Members: Your Board of Directors takes this occasion to call your attention to the fact that the success of the Association depends on the active co-operation of its members. Interesting and varied programs are arranged and members are urged to attend the monthly meetings. Bring your friends; they are most welcome.



November Field Trip will be taken on Sunday, the 17th, starting from Ross, Marin County. Buy round-trip ticket, 65c, and take 8:15 a. m. Sausalito Ferry. In case of heavy rain, trip will be taken the following Sunday. Bring luncheon. Chas. A. Bryant, leader.

Mr. H. S. S. Swarth, Honorary member, died October 22, 1935.

October Meeting: The 219th regular meeting was held on October 10th, room 19, Ferry Building, with twenty-seven members and guests present. President Junea W. Kelly presiding.

Observations were reported as follows:

Brighton Cain: Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Slender-billed Nuthatch, Oakland

Scout Camp, September 23rd; Golden-crowned Kinglet, October 7th.

Mrs. Kelly: Hermit Thrush, Townsend Warbler, Winter Wren, Claremont, October 9th; Pileolated Warbler, Western Flycatcher, Golden Gate Park, October 5th.

Tom Kirksey: White-tailed Kite, Hamilton Field, Marin County, every week-end for the last five weeks.

Commander Parmenter: Anthony Green Heron, South Lake, Golden Gate Park, September 14th; at the Bridges and Alvarado marshes:

	9/16	9/25	10/7
White Pelican	600±	600±	800±
American Egret	39	19	37
Snowy Heron		6	2
Pintail		1200+	400±
Shoveller		---	100±
Hudsonian Curlew		---	1
Yellow-leg	6	12	38
L. B. Dowitcher		---	59
Marbled Godwit		2500±	---
Avocet	300+	300+	200+
No. Phalarope	800±	---	---

Robt. Taylor: Crow, Berkeley campus, September 17th; Audubon Warbler, Oakland, 28th; Pipit, October 2nd, Cedar Waxwing, 5th, Golden-crowned Sparrow, 6th, Mockingbird, 7th, and Hermit Thrush, 8th, in Oakland; Pileolated Warbler, East Oakland, and Long-tailed Chat at Nicholl Park in Richmond, October 13th.

Miss Werner: Creeper and Fox Sparrow, Golden Gate Park, October 8th.

Our speaker for October, Mr. Elmer Aldrich, gave a very interesting talk on his experiences in southern Idaho, which he illustrated with some very fine slides from photographs taken by himself.

Audubon Association of the Pacific

Organized January 25, 1917

For the Study and the Protection of Birds

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Members are responsible for dues until written notice of resignation is received by Treasurer.